

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT -- SUMMER 1981

REMARKS OF SPEAKER VERN RIFFE

PRESIDENT JENNINGS, MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, HONORED GUESTS, FACULTY, STAFF, MEMBERS OF THE CLASS OF 1981, AND FRIENDS AND FAMILY OF THE GRADUATES.

IT IS INDEED AN HONOR AND PLEASURE FOR ME TO HAVE BEEN CHOSEN AS YOUR COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER. WHILE I REGRET THAT MY OLD FRIEND HAROLD ENARSON IS NOT PRESENT TODAY, I AM HONORED TO SHARE THE PLATFORM WITH A NEW FRIEND, PRESIDENT EDWARD JENNINGS.

LET ME SAY A FEW THINGS ABOUT HAROLD AND AUDREY ENARSON AND THE CONTRIBUTIONS THEY HAVE MADE TO OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY. FOR NINE YEARS, PRESIDENT ENARSON HAS SERVED THIS INSTITUTION IN A MANNER THAT IS ADMIRERD BY SCHOLARS AND EDUCATORS THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES AND THE WORLD. THE PEOPLE OF THIS STATE HAVE BEEN LUCKY TO HAVE A MAN LIKE DR. ENARSON PRESIDING OVER THIS STATE'S LARGEST HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION. I HAVE KNOWN DR. ENARSON WELL FOR MANY YEARS. I SINCERELY MEAN IT WHEN I

SAY THAT DR. ENARSON IS ONE OF MY CLOSEST FRIENDS, A MAN WHOSE INTEGRITY AND CAPABILITIES STAND ALONE IN A WORLD CROWDED WITH TALENTED PEOPLE. I WILL GREATLY MISS HAROLD ENARSON, AS A FRIEND AND AS AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER. MY BEST WISHES GO TO HIM ON HIS RETIREMENT.

IT IS MY HONOR TO WELCOME A NEW PRESIDENT TO OSU, EDWARD H. JENNINGS. THIS IS HIS THIRD DAY ON THE JOB. I DON'T KNOW PRESIDENT JENNINGS WELL YET, BUT I LOOK FORWARD TO THE STRENGTHENING OF OUR ASSOCIATION AND FRIENDSHIP. FROM OUR PREVIOUS MEETINGS I AM GREATLY IMPRESSED WITH HIS MOTIVATION AND ENTHUSIASM. I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH HIM IN THE COMING MONTHS.

IT IS A PRIVILEGE TO JOIN IN THE CELEBRATION TODAY OF A MAJOR EVENT IN THE HISTORY OF THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY AND IN THE LIVES OF THESE GRADUATES AND THEIR FAMILIES. TODAY'S CEREMONIES RECOGNIZE THE SOLID ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE GRADUATES, ACCOMPLISHMENTS THAT REQUIRED LONG HOURS OF STUDY AND YEARS OF PERSONAL SACRIFICE.

AS COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER, I ALSO REALIZE THAT I AM THE FINAL OBSTACLE
STANDING BETWEEN YOU GRADUATES AND YOUR DEGREES. YET I HAVE ALWAYS
FOUND SOME COMMENCEMENT ADDRESSES REWARDING, SOME REFRESHING, SOME GREATLY
INSPIRING. I SINCERELY HOPE THAT YOU WILL RECEIVE AT LEAST ONE OF THOSE
BENEFITS FROM MY REMARKS THIS MORNING.

FIRST LET ME OFFER MY PERSONAL CONGRATULATIONS TO THE GRADUATES, FOR
I KNOW THAT HARD WORK AND PERSEVERANCE, AS WELL AS NATURAL ABILITY, ARE
ESSENTIAL FOR AN OHIO STATE DEGREE. EDUCATION IS AN INVESTMENT - AN
INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE. YOUR YEARS AT OHIO STATE HAVE EQUIPPED YOU
NOT ONLY WITH THE SKILLS YOU WILL NEED IN YOUR CAREERS, BUT WITH THE
"SURVIVAL SKILLS" YOU WILL NEED FOR PRODUCTIVE SATISFYING LIVES. THE
YEARS SPENT AT A UNIVERSITY AS LARGE AND DIVERSE AS OHIO STATE ARE YEARS
FOR EXPLORING IDEAS, FOR TRYING OUT LIFESTYLES, FOR TESTING VALUES AND
FORMULATING PRINCIPLES, FOR DISCUSSING THE PROBLEMS OF THE WORLD, AND FOR
PROPOSING SOLUTIONS. THESE ARE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF A UNIVERSITY

EDUCATION--AS FUNDAMENTAL AS CALCULUS, OR CHEMISTRY OR COMPUTER SCIENCE--
AND THEY HAVE BEEN OFFERED TO YOU IN ABUNDANCE DURING YOUR YEARS AT THIS
UNIVERSITY. THEY HAVE PREPARED YOU TO SUCCEED IN ANY NUMBER OF PROFESSIONS,
FROM BOTANY TO INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS, FROM ENGINEERING TO ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL EDUCATION AND IN OTHER PURSUITS RANGING FROM PARENTHOOD TO POLITICS.

THE QUESTION YOU NOW FACE--IF NOT TODAY, THEN TOMORROW OR THE NEXT
DAY--IS "WHAT NOW?" HOW WILL YOU USE YOUR SUPERB TRAINING, YOUR
INTELLIGENCE AND YOUR CONSIDERABLE ENERGY? WILL YOU BE CONSUMED BY A DESIRE
FOR PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENT? WILL YOU RESTRICT YOUR OUTSIDE INTERESTS TO
RUNNING AND RACKETBALL? IN THE LARGER PLAN OF LIFE, WHAT PRIORITY WILL
YOU GIVE TO FAMILY, TO COMMUNITY, TO SERVICE TO THE STATE AND NATION?

OUR FORM OF GOVERNMENT MUST HAVE WIDE CITIZEN SUPPORT AND
PARTICIPATION IN ORDER TO BE EFFECTIVE, JUST AND TRULY DEMOCRATIC.

YOU MUST SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATE. YOU MUST BECOME INVOLVED IN
YOUR GOVERNMENT.

IF YOU WANT GOOD GOVERNMENT ---- THEN BE GOOD GOVERNMENT.

GOVERNMENT IS AS GOOD OR BAD AS THE PEOPLE WILL STAND FOR.

YOUR THOUGHTS, YOUR TALENTS, YOUR ENERGY AND YOUR ABILITIES
ARE NEEDED TO MAKE GOVERNMENT BETTER.

POLITICS, PUBLIC SERVICE, GOVERNMENT - THESE ARE NOT EVIL PURSUITS IN
LIFE, THEY ARE VERY REWARDING ONES. PUBLIC SERVICE IS A PROFESSION IN
WHICH INDIVIDUALS CAN ACTIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIETY. IT IS A PROFESSION
THROUGH WHICH YOU CAN SERVE INDIVIDUAL PERSONS AND HELP THEM CUT RED
TAPE. OF COURSE, IT CAN BE DISCOURAGING AT TIMES, BUT THE GOOD TIMES,
THE TIMES YOU ARE ABLE TO DO THINGS FOR PEOPLE, GREATLY OUTWEIGH THE BAD.

I WAS BROUGHT UP IN A HOME WHERE AN INTEREST IN GOVERNMENTAL SERVICE
REIGNED SUPREME. MY FATHER SERVED AS MAYOR OF MY HOMETOWN FOR OVER 20
YEARS. THROUGHOUT MY CHILDHOOD AND MY ADULT LIFE, MY FATHER INSTILLED
IN ME A RESPECT FOR PUBLIC SERVICE. I AM HAPPY TO SAY THAT AFTER 23
YEARS AS A STATE REPRESENTATIVE AND SEVEN YEARS AS SPEAKER OF THE OHIO

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, THAT RESPECT REMAINS AND HAS EVEN GROWN.

ONE NATIONAL SURVEY OF COLLEGE STUDENTS FOUND THAT BETWEEN 1969 AND 1979 THE PERCENTAGE OF FRESHMEN WHO CONSIDERED IT ESSENTIAL OR VERY IMPORTANT TO KEEP UP WITH POLITICAL AFFAIRS DROPPED FROM 51 PERCENT TO 38 PERCENT. INTEREST IN POLITICAL PARTIES AND IN POLITICS GENERALLY IS DOWN SUBSTANTIALLY, AND LAST NOVEMBER, A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, ONLY 53 PERCENT OF THE ELIGIBLE VOTERS WENT TO THE POLLS. IT WAS THE FIFTH YEAR IN A ROW THAT VOTER PARTICIPATION DECLINED.

THE LACK OF "CIVIC VIRTUE" I SENSE TODAY IS CERTAINLY NOT WITHOUT PRECEDENT IN AMERICAN HISTORY. IN THE LAST CENTURY ALONE, AMERICA HAS UNDERGONE SEVERAL MAJOR SHIFTS IN PRIORITIES. PERIODS OF GREAT ACTIVITY, WHEN EMPHASIS WAS PLACED ON DUTY OF OTHERS, RESPONSIBILITY AND THE VIRTUE OF GIVING, HAVE BEEN FOLLOWED BY PERIODS WHEN SOCIETY TURNED INWARD AND TRIED TO REST.

JOHN F. KENNEDY COULD STIR THE NATION BY URGING AMERICANS TO ASK

NOT WHAT THEIR COUNTRY COULD DO FOR THEM BUT WHAT THEY COULD DO FOR THEIR COUNTRY. BUT THE DREAMS OF THE NEW FRONTIER AND THE GREAT SOCIETY WERE SOON OVERSHADOWED BY AN INCREASINGLY UNPOPULAR WAR IN VIETNAM THAT SAPPED THE NATION'S ENERGIES. WATERGATE, ENERGY CRISES, RUNAWAY INFLATION AND OTHER SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOR WHICH WE HAD NO EASY SOLUTIONS COMPOUNDED THE NATIONAL FEELING OF EXHAUSTION. PEOPLE TURNED INWARD, BECOMING MORE SELF-CENTERED, MORE CONCERNED ABOUT RIGHTS THAN RESPONSIBILITIES, MORE INTERESTED IN TAKING THAN IN GIVING.

BUT NOW I SENSE A NEW ENERGY IN THE PEOPLE OF OHIO AND THE NATION. IF IT HAS NOT YET DEVELOPED INTO A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO THE BROADER GOALS OF SOCIETY IT AT LEAST HAS BROUGHT HOME THE NEED TO ADDRESS SOME OF THE MOST PRESSING PROBLEMS. OPINION POLLSTERS ARE FINDING THAT AMERICANS ARE SEEKING CLOSER BONDS WITH THOSE AROUND THEM, I SEE THIS NATION MOVING INTO THE 1990'S LONGING FOR A NEW "ETHIC OF COMMITMENT."

I URGE YOU, OHIO STATE'S NEWEST ALUMNI, TO DEVELOP THAT ETHIC OF

COMMITMENT. COMMIT YOURSELVES NOT ONLY TO MATERIAL WELL-BEING, BUT ALSO TO YOUR FAMILY AND YOUR FRIENDS. WORK HARD NOT ONLY IN YOUR CHOSEN PROFESSION, NOT ONLY FOR THE SINGLE-ISSUE CAUSES ABOUT WHICH YOU FEEL STRONGLY, BUT ALSO TOWARD STATE AND NATIONAL POLICIES THAT OFFER THE BEST HOPE OF BENEFITTING THE MOST PEOPLE OVER THE YEARS AHEAD.

AN ETHIC OF COMMITMENT WILL REQUIRE COMPROMISE. IT WILL REQUIRE MODERATION. IT WILL REQUIRE SACRIFICE. YET AS JOHN F. KENNEDY SAID IN 1961" ...OF THOSE TO WHOM IS GIVEN, MUCH IS REQUIRED. AND WHEN AT SOME FUTURE DATE THE HIGH COURT OF HISTORY SITS IN JUDGMENT ON EACH OF US, RECORDING WHETHER IN OUR BRIEF SPAN OF SERVICE WE FULFILLED OUR RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE STATE, OUR SUCCESS OR FAILURE, IN WHATEVER OFFICE WE HOLD, WILL BE MEASURED BY THE ANSWERS TO FOUR QUESTIONS: FIRST, WERE WE TRULY MEN OF COURAGE...SECOND, WERE WE TRULY MEN OF JUDGMENT...THIRD, WERE WE TRULY MEN OF INTEGRITY...FINALLY, WERE WE TRULY MEN OF DEDICATION."

COURAGE, JUDGMENT, INTEGRITY, AND DEDICATION. FOR ALL THESE THINGS,

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY HAS EQUIPPED YOU WELL. YOUR ABILITY TO EMPLOY
THESE ATTRIBUTES TO THE LARGER CONCERNS OF THIS STATE AND NATION WILL,
IN LARGE MEASURE, DETERMINE HOW WELL WE AS A PEOPLE CAN ACCOMPLISH
THE TRUE RENEWAL OF THE AMERICAN SPIRIT. AGAIN, MY CONGRATULATIONS
AND BEST WISHES.